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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: KOSOVARS FULFILL ANOTHER STANDARD BY
RECONSTRUCTING SVINJARE, BUT SERB LEADERSHIP DISCOURAGES
IDPS FROM RETURNING TO THEIR HOMES

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Local Contact Group (CG) representatives agreed that the PISG has met the standard on reconstructing Serb houses in Svinjare destroyed in the March 2004 violence.

At a joint meeting between the Contact Group and Serb representatives, Russian COM told the Zvecan mayor, northern Kosovo SNC President Milan Ivanovic, and Svinjare residents that the homes are ready, that IDPs should return, and that Kosovo Albanians and Serbs are living side-by-side elsewhere throughout Kosovo. Other CG members agreed, although our Russian counterpart was the most outspoken. The PISG's meeting its obligations to rebuild Svinjare has brought no relief to displaced Serbs, however. USOP personnel toured the fetid, half-complete buildings where 70 Svinjare IDP families live; it was clear that the hardline Serb leadership in the north is discouraging returns, preferring that IDPs live in squalor in Zvecan rather than in their homes south of the Ibar River. This fits with a pattern of Belgrade/CCK/northern leadership activity to curtail any ties with Kosovar institutions or individual Albanian communities, as we have reported in the past. End Summary.

Svinjare Reconstruction Completed

12. (SBU) On December 15, 2006, the joint UNMIK and Kosovo government Decision-making Board determined that the repair and reconstruction of the properties in Svinjare damaged in March 2004 had been fulfilled. On January 19, Contact Group (CG) representatives from Pristina paid a visit to Svinjare, a mixed (three-quarters Albanian/one quarter Serb) village located in the portion of Mitrovica municipality south of the Ibar, to determine whether this assessment was correct. Both ethnic groups had lived in the village before the conflict, albeit in separate parts of town. Since the conflict, Albanians have referred to the village as Frasher, named for a prominent Albanian literary family, eschewing the village's Serbian name which refers to a place where pigs are kept. Serb homes and secondary buildings had been destroyed and the residents (an estimated 290 people) forced to leave during the violence of March 2004.

13. (SBU) A total of 137 Kosovo Serb-owned houses were

damaged or destroyed during the Kosovo conflict or the March 2004 riots. The Kosovo government initially rebuilt some of the houses using private construction firms, but most Serb residents complained about the poor quality of construction and the need to rebuild secondary buildings (barns and summer kitchens) adjacent to the homes. Few actually returned to Svinjare, although almost all took the 2,000 euro start-up money and income generation assistance offered to returnees. During the past two years, thieves stripped several empty reconstructed houses of some of their fixtures.

¶4. (SBU) In June 2006, the CG made completion of the reconstruction of buildings damaged in Svinjare one of its 13 Priorities for Standards Implementation. Shortly thereafter, Kosovo Prime Minister Agim Ceku tasked the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) to oversee the remaining reconstruction (primarily of secondary buildings) and repairs to vandalized homes. While in Svinjare, PM Ceku adviser Avni Arifi and the head of UNMIK's Office of the KPC Coordinator, MG Christopher Steirns (UK), briefed CG representatives on the work of the KPC. The KPC repaired/reconstructed 77 houses, rebuilt 26 secondary buildings and cleared 960 meters of sewage ditches.

Work on houses and secondary buildings included carpentry, plastering, plumbing, and electrical wiring, as well as clearing rubble. In addition to work by KPC personnel, the Kosovo government contracted with private builders for nine houses, two commercial premises and 42 additional secondary buildings. Construction costs in Svinjare totaled 778,545 euro. The PISG also paid 637,507 euro in unpaid claims to contractors for work completed during the initial rebuilding of Svinjare and a total of 12,000 euros to six families as part of its provision of start-up costs for moving back. All of this money came from the Kosovo Consolidated Budget.

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¶5. (SBU) USOP personnel, joined by German COM and PISG Standards Coordinator Arifi, spoke with five residents of Svinjare and toured one of their houses. All recounted similar experiences: fear of their Albanian neighbors, lack of trust in police or KFOR protection, and regular looting of houses they leave unattended at night. We took issue with their claims that the work done on the houses was sub-standard; we also pointed out that it was unreasonable to expect that an empty house anywhere in Kosovo would not be targeted by looters. Although all the residents said they took the train from Zvecan to Svinjare (less than five miles), we noticed that they departed by a POV.

IDPs Live in Squalid Conditions, But Serb Leadership Discourages Return

¶6. (C) Following the trip to Svinjare, the CG traveled to Zvecan, where we met Mayor Dragisa Milovic, E.O.-listed Deputy Mayor and Serb National Council President for north Kosovo Milan Ivanovic, and the same five Svinjare residents who had shown us one of their homes that morning. The Russian COM, speaking on behalf of the CG, said that the work had been done properly and it was time for the residents to move back. He argued that it would be pointless to invest more money in Svinjare until the residents returned, adding that Serbs and Albanians live side-by-side throughout Kosovo.

Other CG members seconded the Russian COM's views, to the point where Ivanovic said that it was remarkable that Kosovo had brought the U.S. and Russian positions so close together.

Ivanovic then launched into a long, turgid criticism of UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari and the final status process.

¶7. (SBU) Following the meeting with the mayor, one of the Svinjare residents asked us to visit the building where he now lives. Some 200 yards from the municipality, there are two unfinished apartment buildings surrounded by fetid standing water and trash. Inside, we found unfinished walls, more standing water and jury-rigged electrical hookups. We entered two apartments, both small and largely unfurnished, with primitive toilets and no kitchens. We commiserated with

our guide, asking about his view of the Serb leadership and its advocacy of IDP issues. He made plain his belief that Belgrade does not care about him or his family.

¶8. (C) Note: The rest of the former residents of Svinjare live rent-free in modern rowhouses on a hillside overlooking Zvecan. UNMIK Mitrovica head of office Gerry Gallucci told us this group has no interest in returning to Svinjare and has become the most radical element within their new community. End note.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: Our hope was that by holding the PISG's feet to the fire on Svinjare, the displaced would be able to return to their homes. Unfortunately, the diatribe from Milan Ivanovic, even in the face of the squalid conditions in which some of the former residents live, indicate that the conscious policy promoted by the CCK and the hardline northern Serb leadership of separating the two ethnic communities -- likely promoted, at least tacitly, by Belgrade -- will end up blocking Serb returns to Svinjare. The PISG has, in our judgement, met the CG standard for Svinjare, but the tragedy is that this will bring no relief to its former residents.

¶10. (SBU) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable in its entirety for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari. K Aidanow